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## Help for Civil Servant-Soldiers Rolls Through Committee

By Stephen Barr

Friday, May 9, 2003; Page B02

A proposal designed to close any pay gap faced by civil service employees who are called to active duty in the military reserves has been approved by the House Government Reform Committee.

The amendment was sponsored by Rep. Chris Bell (D-Tex.) and Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and approved on a voice vote with almost no debate Wednesday night. The Lantos-Bell provision was wrapped into a large bill -- approved by the committee -- that would overhaul the civil service system at the Defense Department and substantially alter major personnel practices at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The amendment would require federal agencies to make up the difference between civil service and military pay for employees on active military duty. Federal employees would qualify for the differential when called to duty for more than 30 days or while hospitalized for or recovering from an illness or injury resulting from active duty.

More than two dozen bills have been introduced in Congress to provide financial, medical and other assistance to members of the armed forces, including the reserves and the National Guard. In addition to Lantos and Bell, Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.), Sens. Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.) and Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) and others have introduced bills to help federal employees make up for lost pay when activated for military duty.

Congressional efforts to make up the difference in pay have stalled in the past. But Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.) cut short debate Wednesday night by quickly telling Bell, after he introduced the amendment, that the Republican-controlled committee would not oppose it.

Initial estimates show the proposal would cost \$104 million over five years.

Pentagon officials estimate that 30 percent of activated reservists face a loss of income during mobilization or deployment. A recent General Accounting Office report, based on data collected before 2001, said 41 percent of reservists reported income losses.

The report provided no data specifically on activated federal employees.

About 65,000 reservists are employed by federal agencies. An additional 48,000 federal technicians are required to be members of the National Guard as a condition of their employment.

Opponents of making up the difference in salaries point out that joining the reserves or the National Guard is voluntary and that federal employees who volunteer should understand the financial implications associated with active duty.

But supporters of closing the pay gap argue that times have changed since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and that reserve and Guard units are being called up more frequently. They also note that an increasing number of private-sector employers make up the difference between civilian and military pay

for mobilized employees.

Lantos had introduced similar legislation earlier this year. At that time, he said, "The government has a duty to the men and women wearing the uniform of the reserves and National Guard to ensure they and their families are not financial burdened when they answer their call to duty."

## More Support for the Troops

Last month, Kay Coles James, director of the Office of Personnel Management, called on federal agencies to shoulder the cost of health insurance premiums for employees called to duty in the National Guard and military reserves.

This week, OPM announced that about 80 agencies had responded to her call. In a statement, James thanked the agencies for responding "with one voice, in strong support of our troops."

## Talk Shows

Judy Conti and Kerry O'Brien of the D.C. Employment Justice Center will be the guests on "FEDtalk" at 11 a.m. today on [federalnewsradio.com](http://federalnewsradio.com).

Grant Green, undersecretary for management at the State Department, will be the guest on "The Business of Government Hour" at 8 a.m. tomorrow on WJFK radio (106.7 FM).

"Is Your Workplace Prepared for SARS?" will be the topic of discussion on the Imogene B. Stewart call-in program at 8 a.m. Sunday on WOL radio (1450 AM).

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